



Thailand

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Thailand is a democratically governed constitutional monarchy that until 1992 had a history of military coups and powerful bureaucratic influences on political life. Since 1992 there have been five national multiparty elections, which transferred power to successive governments through peaceful, democratic processes. The King exerts strong informal influence but never has used his constitutionally mandated power to veto legislation or dissolve the elected House of Representatives. There is a bicameral Parliament. The coalition Government, led by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's Democrat Party, was formed in 1997. General elections were scheduled for January 2001. The judiciary is independent, but is subject to corruption.

The security forces have wide-ranging legal powers, derived primarily from past militarily controlled administrations. Since 1992 the armed forces have become increasingly professional and increasingly subject to civilian control. Their influence in politics has been diminishing. The Royal Thai Police have primary responsibility for internal security and law enforcement. Elements of both the armed forces and the police have a reputation for corruption. Some members of the security forces committed serious human rights abuses.

Thailand is a newly industrializing country with a market-based economy and strong tradition of private enterprise, although state enterprises play a significant role in some sectors. A financial crisis that began in July 1997 led to a severe contraction in the economy lasting through early 1999. The economy resumed moderate growth in early 1999; Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is estimated at 4 percent for 2000. Annual per capita income, which peaked at \$3,000 in 1996, is approximately \$2,000, although depreciation of the local currency during the crisis magnified the decline. Roughly 60 percent of the population remains rural and agricultural, although agriculture only accounts for approximately 10 percent of GDP. Rice and other agricultural and fisheries products are important exports, as are electrical goods, textiles, and automobiles. Government efforts to narrow the gap between urban and rural living standards have met with only mixed success, and the Government increasingly focused on education and investment promotion in poor areas to reduce disparities in income distribution. Even though government regulation generally provides protection for individual economic interests, including property rights, a lack of transparency in bureaucratic decisionmaking and a gap between regulation and enforcement sometimes leads to uneven treatment of some firms and institutions. Some areas of Government remain subject to corruption.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, significant problems remain in several areas. Police officers killed a number of criminal suspects while attempting to apprehend them and killed suspects in custody. The Government remained reluctant to prosecute vigorously those who committed such abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity.

Police occasionally beat suspects, at times to coerce confessions. An ingrained culture of corruption persists in many parts of the civilian bureaucracy and in the security forces. Routine demands for bribes undermine the rule of law and permit the continuation of various illegal activities such as income tax evasion, illegal gambling, drug violations, goods smuggling, trafficking in persons, and prostitution. Enforcement of a broad range of laws and regulations by police continued to be noticeably lax.

Conditions in prison and immigration detention facilities are poor due to severe overcrowding. However, conditions improved somewhat at the Bangkok Immigration Detention Center during the year. Lengthy pretrial detention and the prolonged detention of some aliens remain problems. The judiciary suffers from corruption and at times security forces infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The media practiced some self-censorship, and there were some restrictions on freedom of movement. The Government hindered the activity of some human rights groups.

The 1997 Constitution increased legal protections for women and the disabled; however, some inequities in the law remain. Violence against women and societal discrimination against women are problems. Trafficking in women and children and forced prostitution are serious problems. Societal discrimination against hilltribes and religious and ethnic minorities persists.

There were reports of forced labor and child labor.

The 1997 Constitution contains provisions designed to combat corruption and increase government accountability, transparency, and public participation in the political process. The Government has adopted implementing legislation to bring government practice in line with these reforms over the last 3 years.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no reports of politically motivated killings by government agents; however, legal organizations, reputable nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), and the press continued to report that some police officers used unwarranted lethal force in apprehending criminal suspects. Armed alleged drug traffickers in particular continued to confront and threaten police officers violently, and officers used deadly force during some arrest attempts. Police killed several criminal suspects while in custody. New procedures that regulate the investigation of deaths in custody went into place in June.

Following the armed seizure of the Ratchaburi provincial hospital by 10 Burmese dissidents in January, military and police forces entered the hospital to free the more than 700 patients, staff, and visitors held as hostages and to secure the premises. In the raid, government forces killed the hostage-takers; no hostages were injured. In media reports after the incident, some hostages claimed that the Burmese gunmen had been apprehended and disarmed before the security forces killed them; no evidence corroborated this claim. The Government, including the Prime Minister, denied the claims and maintained that the Burmese were killed during the course of the raid. Despite calls by the press for an investigation, the Government conducted no public investigation, and no other evidence to corroborate claims of abuse was presented.

In May 11 police officers were sentenced to life in prison or death for their roles in the 1994 killings of 4 Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials.

The two senior police officers arrested in the June 1999 Nonthaburi abduction and killing of a suspected car thief remain free on bail, and the court case was still pending at year's end. The Department of Corrections exonerated the prison guards accused in the June 1999 killings of three would-be escapees from Udon Thani provincial prison. The Department of Corrections also found no criminal behavior in the January 1998 killing of four prisoners escaping from Bangkok remand prison. Both cases are closed.

Previously the Government investigated some extrajudicial killings; however, in the past, it prosecuted few police or military officers accused of such abuses. A senior prosecutor in 1999 stated that 99 percent of all cases in which government officials were accused of extrajudicial killings were dropped on the basis of insufficient evidence. Senior prosecutors and legal associations claimed that most cases eventually were dismissed because regulations outlined in the Criminal Code required public prosecutors to rely exclusively upon the recommendations of the police when determining whether to bring a case for criminal prosecution. Initial inquiries were carried out by police officers, often the same units responsible for the killing. Credible sources reported that police investigators routinely determined that police took no wrongful action. Routine exoneration of police officers contributed to a climate of impunity that is a significant factor in preventing any major change in police behavior. It also discourages relatives of victims from pressing for prosecution. However, in June a new procedure for investigating suspicious deaths, including deaths occurring while the individual is in custody, took effect and is part of the amended Criminal Procedure Code. It requires, among other things, that the prosecutor, a forensic pathologist, and a local administrator participate in the investigation and that family members may have legal representation at the inquests.

Families rarely take advantage of a provision in the law that allows them to bring personal lawsuits against police officers for criminal action during arrest. If pursued by the family, the case is handled by the same office--in some instances by the same prosecutor--who already has ruled that no criminal action occurred. There is no information available to determine how many cases are settled out of court. However, in cases in which suits are filed, the official charged often compensates the family of the deceased, and the lawsuit is waived.

The Government continued to prosecute two cases of suspected extrajudicial killing from 1996. By year's end, the Attorney General had not yet decided whether to proceed with murder charges against the police officer implicated in the 1996 Supan Buri killing of six suspected drug dealers. The trial of the police officer charged in the 1996 killing of farmer activist Joon Bhoonkhuntod was still in progress in December.

In December 1999, The Court dismissed the murder charges in the 1996 case of the suspected political killing of environmental protester Thong-in Kaew-wattha.

In November police intercepted and assaulted a vehicle in Kanchanaburi province that was commandeered by 9 Burmese persons who had been convicted of violent felonies in Thailand and were fleeing toward Burma. The escapees were armed, had critically wounded one prison official, and had taken hostages. In the course of rescuing the hostages, security forces killed all the escapees. One hostage was killed in the shooting.

There were 11 killings of political canvassers during the election campaigns leading up to the January 2001 general election and March 2001 Senate elections. All the victims worked for all political parties, and all the killings allegedly were politically motivated. Police arrested several persons in connection with the killings, and investigations continued at year's end. Legal organizations, reputable NGO's, and the press reported that some police officers used unwarranted lethal force in apprehending criminal suspects.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

As a result of a freedom of information request by the victims' families, the Government in May released the Defense Ministry's report on the military forces' suppression of political demonstrations in May 1992. The report provided no new information on the whereabouts of the remaining 38 prodemocracy protesters still listed as missing. Most, if not all, are presumed by family members and NGO's to be dead.

The results of a government investigation into the 1991 disappearance of Labor Congress of Thailand president Thanong Po-an conducted by the House Justice and Human Rights Standing Committee have never been released to the public.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution and the Criminal Code forbid torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; however, NGO's and legal organizations continue to report that some members of the police occasionally beat suspects in order to coerce confessions. Authorities also investigated police officers accused of raping and extorting sex from female suspects in detention.

In January the Ministry of Defense reported that an Army Lieutenant was convicted of July 1999 sexual crimes against a group of Burmese refugee women, but the lieutenant received only a 1-year suspended sentence.

Some NGO's accused police of using excessive force in July when demonstrators engaged in a long-term protest against the Government attempted to enter Government House by force. This compound contains the Prime Minister's office. Other participants in the protest said that the police had acted professionally. The police also maintained that they acted with restraint to protect government property. Approximately 20 persons sustained minor injuries.

Among junior police officers, corruption remains widespread. In September residents of Nakhon Si Thammarat rioted in response to frequent demands for bribes by traffic police. Police officials complain that low pay for members of police forces makes them susceptible to bribes.

Some corrupt police and soldiers are involved in prostitution and trafficking in women and children (see Sections 5, 6.c., and 6.f.).

Prison conditions are poor but in general they do not threaten the life or health of inmates. Already severe prison overcrowding worsened during the year. Sleeping accommodations and access to medical care remain areas of concern that require continued attention. Medical care in prisons is inadequate. To care for a total prison population of 219,176 inmates in 168 prisons that have a total design capacity of 100,000 prisoners, the Corrections Department employs only 17 full-time doctors and 7 full-time dentists.

Prison authorities sometimes used solitary confinement to punish difficult prisoners. They also used heavy leg irons without apparent cause. Credible sources continued to report that prisoners captured in escape attempts were beaten severely.

Poor conditions in Bangkok's Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Center (IDC) improved somewhat during the year, but conditions in provincial detention centers remained very poor. There were no reports that detainees transferred to Bangkok arrived in a debilitated state as in 1999. Immigration detention facilities are not administered by the Department of Corrections and are not subject to many of the regulations that govern the regular prison system. The number of long-term immigrant detainees declined due to a 1998 MOI policy that allows illegal immigrants arrested in border areas to be deported without first being sent to an immigration detention center, but some foreigners still face trial delays of up to 6 months. Despite the drop in the detainee population, overcrowding and shortages of food and water in the immigration detention centers remain significant problems. Early in the year, the Department of Corrections suspended plans to construct two additional prisons for women accused of drug-related offenses.

Access to prisons is not restricted, and the Government permits visits by human rights monitors and the Thai International Red Cross.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

With few exceptions, including crimes in progress, the law requires police officers making an arrest to have warrants, and authorities respect this provision in practice. Under the Constitution, persons must be informed of likely charges against them immediately after arrest and must be allowed to inform someone of their arrest. Detainees have a right to have a lawyer present during questioning, and the police generally respected this right in practice during the year. Foreign prisoners sometimes are forced to sign confessions without benefit of a competent translator.

Police also are required to submit criminal cases to prosecutors for the filing of court charges within 48 hours of arrest. However, lawyers report that the police rarely bring their cases to court within this period since the Criminal Procedure Code allows an extension period of up to 3 days. Police also may seek court permission to hold suspects for additional periods (up to a maximum of 82 days for the most serious offenses) to carry out investigations. In addition laws and regulations place any offense for which the maximum penalty is less than 3 years under the jurisdiction of the district courts, which have special procedures. In these cases, police are required to submit cases to public prosecutors within 72 hours of arrest. There is a functioning bail system.

The only legal basis for detention by the police without specific charges for long periods (up to 480 days) is the Anti-Communist Activities Act, which authorities did not invoke during the year. In March the Government approved legislation to abrogate this law (see Section 2.a.); the new legislation is to become effective in June 2001.

Of more than 200,000 prison inmates, approximately 78,000 were charged with narcotics violations. Approximately 27 percent of the total prison population were pretrial detainees. Pretrial detainees usually are not segregated from the general prison population. According to one lawyers' association, pretrial detainees are held an average of 60 days.

The Government does not use exile as a means of political control.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, while the judiciary generally is regarded as independent, it is subject to corruption and has a reputation for venality.

The civilian judicial system has three levels of courts: Courts of first instance; courts of appeal; and the Supreme Court. A separate military court hears criminal and civil cases pertaining to military personnel as well as those brought during periods of martial law. There is no right to appeal military court decisions. The Constitutional Court, charged with interpreting the Constitution, began operating in 1998; the Court provides a mechanism to implement the Constitution fully. The courts became fully independent of the Ministry of Justice in August. Islamic (Shari'a) courts provide due process and hear only civil cases concerning members of the Muslim minority. Access to courts or administrative bodies to seek redress is provided for and respected.

There is no trial by jury. Trials for misdemeanors are decided by a single judge, and more serious cases require two or more judges. While most trials are public, the court may order a trial closed. This is done most often in cases involving national security or the royal family. Career civil service judges preside over the

courts. Judicial appointments and judicial bodies are not subject to parliamentary review.

The Constitution provides for the presumption of innocence. Defendants tried in ordinary criminal courts enjoy a broad range of legal rights, including access to a lawyer of their choosing. A government program provides free legal advice to the poor, but indigent defendants are not provided with counsel at public expense automatically. Most free legal aid comes from private groups, including the Thai Lawyers Association and the Thai Women Lawyers Association.

There were no reports of political prisoners. Sorayut Sakunnanasantisat, a Muslim mullah convicted of offenses against the monarchy and of violating national security for leading a political protest in 1990, was released from prison in December 1999.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the rights, and the Government generally respects them in practice. With few exceptions, including crimes in progress, the Constitution requires police to obtain a warrant from a court prior to conducting a search. However, the procedures for issuing warrants are not standardized, primarily because various laws such as the Criminal Procedure Code and internal government regulations, including those that apply to the police department, have not been amended to comply with the Constitution. The laws must be amended to comply with the Constitution by 2002.

Lawyers' associations reported that police at times endorsed blank search warrants or used legitimate warrants to conduct intrusive searches outside the stated evidentiary domain. NGO's concerned with the welfare of highlanders reported that police and military units carried out several warrantless searches of villages for narcotics in northern provinces during the year. This type of operation is permitted under both the Constitution and the Narcotics Prevention and Suppression Act of 1976 in cases in which there is reasonable suspicion and an urgent search is deemed necessary. However, some academic groups claimed that the searches were arbitrary and violated the villagers' civil rights. The Anti-Communist Activities Act, which had allowed officials engaged in "Communist suppression operations" to conduct searches without warrants, was abrogated in March (see Section 1.d.).

The Director of the Telephone Organization of Thailand resigned in June following disclosure of illegal wiretaps on the residential telephone of Wira Somkhawmkhit, an anticorruption activist (see Section 4).

Security services monitor persons who espouse extremist or highly controversial views, including foreign visitors.

NGO's concerned with the welfare of women had reported in the past that hospital and district officials sometimes changed the identification of unwed expectant mothers from "Miss" to "Mrs.," although it is illegal to do so and despite the fact that the women possessed no marriage or divorce certificates. Lacking these documents, the women could encounter difficulties in obtaining official documents needed for some business and government transactions. In 1995 the MOI warned clerks against making such an error.

Section 2 Respect For Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for, and citizens generally enjoy, a large measure of freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. However, the Government may restrict these rights to preserve national security, maintain public order, preserve the rights of others, and protect public morals. In practice this rarely has been done. Laws that prohibit criticism of the royal family (*lesé majesté*), threats to national security, or speech likely to incite disturbances or insult Buddhism remain in place under the Constitution.

The Constitution makes it unlawful for the Government to censor, ban, license, or restrict print or broadcast media, except by specific legislation in times of crisis. While newspapers and periodicals practice some self-censorship, especially with regard to the monarchy and national security problems, media criticism of political parties, public figures, and the Government is common and vigorous. Journalists generally are free to comment on governmental activities without fear of official reprisal.

During the year, there were two cases of suspected intimidation of the press. In April the Editor in Chief of the Chiang Mai daily newspaper Pak Nua was shot and seriously wounded in an attempted murder, but

recovered. Police arrested four soldiers, all of whom were detained without bail. One civilian suspect was not arrested. The editor believes that his repeated critical reporting on the local government led to the assault. His statements have implicated several local government officials. The case is under investigation. The Government and the Prime Minister strongly criticized the murder attempt.

In August unknown persons detonated a bomb at the front gate of the home of the crime editor of the sensationalist Bangkok daily newspaper Khao Sod, causing only property damage. The editor wrote a daily column that used innuendo to combat both organization crime and police corruption. No one claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Under the 1941 Printing and Advertisement Act, the Royal Thai Police Special Branch issued warnings to publications for various violations such as disturbing the peace, interfering with public safety, or offending public morals. The 1941 Act permits police closure of newspapers or printing presses in times of war or national emergency, but only with a court order. No such closures occurred during the year. Legislation was proposed in 1998 to revoke the act. The Juridical Council approved the revocation of the act, but final revocation awaits approval by the Council of State.

An antipornography law allows police to restrict or confiscate printed publications and other materials deemed obscene; the interpretation generally is limited to hard-core pornographic material.

Domestic publications continued to present a wide range of political and social commentary. Unless critical of the royal family or the monarchy, foreign and domestic books normally are not censored and circulate freely. Police have the authority to ban the importation of publications but generally do not exercise it. In March the Government set a date of June 2001 to abolish the 1952 Anti-Communist Activities Act, which had been created to counter the threat of Communism through media restriction.

Radio and television stations enjoy the same constitutional protections of freedom of expression and speech as the print media. All radio and television stations are licensed by the Government, and most are operated under the direct or indirect oversight of the Government or the armed forces. Radio and television station profits are retained by organizations that control frequencies, such as government ministries, universities, and the military services. The military services retain 40 to 50 radio and television frequencies for national security purposes, despite civilian government assurance that the military services may use all broadcasting frequencies in the event of a national emergency without the need to own them.

Radio stations must renew their licenses every year, and their signals are broadcast via government transmitters. They are required by law to broadcast government-produced newscasts twice daily, 30 minutes each in the morning and evening.

There is one cable television network. It enjoys almost complete autonomy under the indirect oversight of the Mass Communications Authority of Thailand. In addition a wholly independent ultra-high-frequency television station (ITV) managed by a private consortium including the outspoken Nation Multimedia Group had operated since 1996. In May it was purchased by another corporation affiliated with Thai Rak Thai Party leader Thaksin Shinawatra. One new 24-hour, independent all news station, operated by former owners of ITV, began broadcasting exclusively on cable television in June.

Programmers generally are free to determine the nature and content of television broadcasts. However, as with the print media, self-censorship exists. Stations occasionally censor or "black out" portions of programming that they deem politically sensitive or pornographic. A censorship board exists in the Prime Minister's office, but it rarely restricts television or radio broadcasts.

The Constitution calls for the liberalization of the broadcast media and the establishment of an independent National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to oversee frequency management; it expects to be operational in April 2001. The seven Commission members are expected to be selected from four broad categories: Government, broadcasting, NGO's, and universities. The NBC is authorized to redistribute frequencies previously controlled by the Government to eligible organizations or individuals in the country. The media criticized the proposed implementation regulations, arguing that they contain broad censorship powers and allows the Government to retain a large number of its frequencies.

Under the 1930 Film Act, theater owners and broadcasters must submit films that they plan to show to the film censorship board for review. The board may require that portions of the film be removed, or it may ban the film. Reasons for censoring films include violating moral and cultural norms and disturbing the public order and national security. Theater owners and broadcasters frequently censor films themselves before submitting them to the board. According to the office of the Film Censorship Board, 176 films were submitted for review

in 1999, the most recent year available. Two films were banned in 1999.

Activity on the Internet remains unregulated.

The Constitution provides for the right to engage in academic pursuits, and academic freedom is respected. The Ministry of Education edits public school textbooks. No textbooks were censored during the year.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Permits are not required for private meetings or gatherings unless held on public property or organized by foreign nationals; these are granted routinely.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Private associations must register with the Government; such registration is approved routinely.

In November in Ubon Ratchathani province, villagers allegedly paid by the Government's electric power authority violently dispersed a longstanding protest by the Assembly of the Poor and other persons at the Pak Mun dam. The villagers seriously injured 4 protesters and burned more than 500 temporary shelters. A police investigation was in progress at year's end (see Section 1.c.).

c. Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion is protected by law, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it restricts the missionary activities of some groups. The Constitution requires that the monarch be a Buddhist. The state religion is in effect Theravada Buddhism; however, it is not designated as such.

The Constitution requires the Government "to patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions." The State subsidizes the activities of the three largest religious communities (Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian). Since mid-1999 the Government has provided more than \$49 million (2 billion baht) to support Buddhist and Muslim institutes of higher education; to fund religious education programs in public and private schools; to provide daily allowances for monks and Muslim clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts; and to subsidize travel and health care for monks and Muslim clerics. This figure also includes an annual budget for the renovation and repair of Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques, the maintenance of historic Buddhist sites, and the daily upkeep of the Central Mosque in Pattani.

The Government plays an active role in religious affairs. The Religious Affairs Department (RAD), which is located in the Ministry of Education, registers religious organizations. In order to be registered, a religious organization first must be accepted into an officially recognized ecclesiastical group. There were seven groups, including one for the Buddhist community, one for the Muslim community, one for the Catholic community, and for Protestant denominations. Government registration confers some benefits, including access to state subsidies, tax-exempt status, and preferential allocation of resident visas for organization officials. Although some activities of groups that have not been accepted into one of the existing recognized groups have been restricted, in general unregistered religious organizations operate freely. There were no reports of the extortion of unregistered groups by local officials during the year.

Under the provisions of the Religious Organizations Act of 1969, the Department of Religious Affairs recognizes a new religion if a national census shows that it has at least 5,000 adherents, has a uniquely recognizable theology, and is not politically active. However, since 1984 the Government has maintained a policy of not recognizing any new religious faiths. This has restricted the activities of some groups that have not been accepted into one of the existing religious governing bodies on doctrinal or other grounds.

Religious instruction is required in public schools at both the primary (grades 1 through 6) and secondary (grades 7 through 12) education levels. Students at the primary level are required to take 80 hours of instruction per academic year in religious studies classes. Instruction is limited to Buddhism and Islam. During the year, some parts of the country with large Muslim student populations do not have Muslim studies courses. Muslim students in these schools generally were directed to school libraries to participate in Muslim self-study courses.

National identity cards produced by the MOI included the religious affiliation of the holder. The change was implemented in 1999 in response to the demands of parliamentarians who wanted easier identification of persons who required Muslim burial. Persons who fail or choose not to indicate religious affiliation in their applications may be issued cards without religious information.

The Government permitted foreign missionary groups to work freely throughout the country, although it also maintained policies that favored proselytizing by citizens.

The number of foreign missionaries officially registered with the Government is limited to a quota that originally was established by the RAD in 1982. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were deported or harassed for working without registration, although the activities of Muslim professors and clerics were subjected disproportionately to scrutiny on national security grounds because of continued government concern about the potential resurgence of Muslim separatist activities in the south.

Laws prohibiting speech likely to insult Buddhism remain in place under the 1997 Constitution. The police, who have legal authority under the Printing and Advertisement Act of 1941 to issue written warnings or orders suspending the publication or distribution of printed materials considered offensive to public morals, did not use it to restrict the publication or distribution of religious literature during the year. The act requires all theater owners and broadcasters to submit films scheduled for screening to a government film censorship board for review (see Section 2.a.).

Muslim female civil servants are not permitted to wear headscarves when dressed in civil servant uniforms.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for the right of citizens to change their residence or workplace, and authorities generally respect this right in practice; however, there were some exceptions. Longstanding written restrictions on the travel and domicile of certain Vietnamese resident aliens who immigrated to Thailand in 1945 and 1946, and Chinese who immigrated between 1953 and 1961, remain in place. In addition other long-term noncitizen residents, including several hundred tribal people, officially are required to seek permission from local authorities or the army for foreign or domestic travel. In practice authorities rarely enforce these restrictive measures, and registered resident aliens move freely within the country.

During the year, the Government permitted a total of 99,974 Burmese, Cambodian, and Lao workers already in the country to hold manual labor jobs in 18 sectors. These persons were permitted to work and to move freely in 37 of the 76 provinces. The Government deported 163,966 migrant workers and families during the year. However, NGO's reported that a large number of those deported later returned to the country.

The country is not a signatory to the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. However, the Government continued to provide first asylum to small numbers of Vietnamese and Lao asylum seekers pending their resettlement in other countries as well as to persons unable to meet the refugee definition pending arrangements to return them to their countries of origin.

Along the border with Burma, the Government generally followed its policy of providing first asylum to new arrivals, referred to as displaced persons. Provincial screening committees determine eligibility to enter the refugee border camps based upon very narrow criteria, limited to those who flee actual fighting rather than on broader grounds of persecution on the basis of race, religion, ethnic group, social class, or political opinion. Consequently, several thousand asylum seekers from Burma, primarily of the Karen ethnic group, who resided in Thailand but previously were not acknowledged as refugees, were given refugee status during the year and were permitted to receive assistance and protection in designated refugee camps.

The Government and the UNHCR do not extend displaced person status to the large number of the Shan ethnic minority members who have crossed the border into the country from Burma but who have not requested refugee status.

In June and August, the Government repatriated 116 Burmese deemed ineligible for assistance in the camps. The UNHCR unsuccessfully appealed on behalf of those asylum seekers.

Most of those returned to Burma in mid-year reportedly have returned to the camps.

There is no legislation regarding the treatment of refugees. However, the Government has continued to permit the UNHCR to exercise its mandate with regard to small numbers of Vietnamese and Lao asylum seekers awaiting repatriation. The Government also upheld its 1998 decision to allow the UNHCR to play a formal role in monitoring and providing protection to about 130,000 refugees from Burma, mostly ethnic minorities, in more than a dozen sites near the border with Burma. The UNHCR's previous mandate had been limited to a few hundred ethnic Burman students at the Burmese Center, formerly known as the Burmese Student Safe Area, located in Ratchaburi province. The Government continued to restrict access to the Center to those persons from Burma to whom the UNHCR had accorded refugee status.

After the October 1999 takeover of the Embassy of Burma in Bangkok by Burmese dissidents, the Government accelerated the pace of third-country resettlement of Burmese students. Since then more than 1,200 have been resettled in nine countries.

The Government also continued to allow NGO's to provide food, medical services, housing, and other services to Burmese refugees near the border. Government officials periodically arrested Burmese outside designated camps as illegal aliens, including some recognized as "persons of concern" by the UNHCR.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides for the right of citizens to choose or change their government peacefully through free and fair elections based on universal suffrage. Voting is compulsory. Eligible voters who fail to exercise their voting responsibilities, except for those excused on reasonable grounds, are subject to the loss of certain rights, including the right to be a candidate in future elections. However, the Constitution prohibits Buddhist monks and nuns from seeking public office. Citizens last exercised this right in an election in 1996 that generally was viewed as free, but was marred by widespread vote buying, a recurrent problem. Peaceful transitions have marked all changes of government since 1992.

The campaign for the January 2001 general election was free and fair, but was marred by alleged vote-buying. Monitoring by the Election Commission established by the Constitution lessened the most egregious offenses observed in past campaigns.

The country is a democratically governed constitutional monarchy that until 1992 had a history of military coups and powerful bureaucratic influences on political life. Since 1992 there have been five national multiparty elections, which transferred power to successive governments through peaceful, democratic processes. The King exerts strong informal influence but has never has used his constitutionally mandated power to veto legislation or dissolve the elected House of Representatives. There is a bicameral Parliament. The coalition Government, led by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's Democrat Party, was formed in 1997. General elections were scheduled for January 2001.

In August the first directly elected Senate took office. The Senate election required multiple rounds of voting for some districts because the Election Commission voided some results due to perceived irregularities such as evidence of vote-buying. The election provided a first test of new election laws. In October the Constitutional Court ruled that the Election Commission could disqualify a candidate whom the Commission finds guilty of electoral irregularities.

While there are no legal restrictions on their political participation, women generally are underrepresented in national politics, especially at senior levels. There was essentially no change in the number of women assigned or elected to positions of leadership. There are 15 women among the 264 members of the House of Representatives; in the 200-member Senate, 21 Senators are women.

Of the Parliament elected in 1996, there were 22 women among the 393 members of the House of Representatives. On average less than 10 percent of Parliament members have been women; however, this figure has risen steadily. Following the resignation of one woman from the Cabinet to compete in the election for Bangkok Governor, there are two women in the 48-member Cabinet. On average approximately 5 percent of Cabinet members in recent years have been women. Although over half of civil service employees are women, few hold senior positions.

No laws prohibit the participation of ethnic minorities, but few hold positions of authority in national politics. Muslims from the south hold significant elected posts in the Government, although they continue to be underrepresented in local and provincial government positions, which are appointed by the central Government. There were 8 Muslim Members of the Senate and 17 Muslim Members in the 1996 Parliament, including Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A wide variety of local, domestic, and international human rights organizations work on controversial problems without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases freely. Government officials generally were cooperative and responsive to their views; however, at times the Government hindered the activity of a few human rights groups.

Very few NGO's are accorded tax-exempt status, and this sometimes hampers the ability of domestic human

rights organizations to secure adequate funding.

The independent National Counter Corruption Commission began an investigation into the wiretap surveillance of the telephone of Wira Somkwamkhit, Chairman of the People's Rights Protection Group, an anticorruption NGO. Wira had been investigating corruption charges against then-Deputy Prime Minister Sanan Khrachonprasat, who was forced to resign after the Commission found that he had falsified financial statements.

In reaction to the 1999 seizure of the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok and the January seizure of the Ratchaburi Hospital by Burmese dissidents, the security forces stepped up enforcement against NGO's working with Burmese exiles. Some NGO's reported that authorities closed their offices, seized their property, and arrested several activists. In November and December, two foreign activists who worked with NGO's to help Burmese exile groups were denied entry into the country on the basis of the national interest clause of the Immigration Act.

The Constitution mandates the establishment of a permanent 11-member National Commission on Human Rights (CHR). The newly elected Senate had selected 9 of its 11 members by year's end from the list of 22 nominees made by the previous Senate. The Commission when operational would operate as a separate government entity to prepare an annual evaluation of the human rights situation for the National Assembly, propose policies and recommendations for amending laws to the National Assembly, promote measures to educate citizens on human rights, and investigate human rights abuses.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution provides for equal treatment under the law without respect to race, sex, religion, disability, language, or social status. In practice some discrimination exists, and government enforcement of equal protection statutes is uneven.

Women

Domestic abuse continues to be a serious problem affecting the welfare of many women; reliable reports indicate that domestic abuse occurs across all social classes. Specific laws concerning domestic violence have not been enacted. Spousal and child abuse are covered by assault provisions in the Criminal Code, but rules of evidence often make prosecuting such cases difficult. Police do not enforce laws against such violence vigorously, and domestic violence often goes unreported because many victims and authorities continue to regard domestic abuse as a private, not a legal, matter. NGO's supported programs designed to aid victims, including emergency hotlines, temporary shelters, counseling services, and a television program designed to increase awareness of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, and other women's issues. The Government's "one-stop" crisis centers in state-run hospitals established to care for abused women and children continued operation but faced budget difficulties.

Under the Criminal Code rape is illegal. However, a husband may not be prosecuted for spousal rape. In 1998 the Government proposed changes to the Criminal Code that would redefine the term rape to include marital rape. The proposed changes were pending at year's end.

According to credible sources, rapes and domestic assaults are underreported, in part because law enforcement agencies are widely perceived to be incapable of bringing perpetrators to justice. Since 1994 police have sought to change this perception and encourage women to report sexual crimes through the use of teams of female police officers that operate in metropolitan Bangkok police stations, with a total of 20 female investigators. The police expanded this program to three provinces by adding an additional 9 female officers.

Prostitution is illegal but flourishes. It is culturally ingrained and often is protected by local officials with a commercial interest in it (see Sections 1.c., 6.c., and 6.f.). Trafficking in women and children is a serious problem. Government and NGO estimates of the number of women and children engaged in prostitution vary widely. Many NGO's and government departments report a figure of 200,000 persons, which is considered a conservative estimate. This figure includes children under age 18 and foreigners. In border areas, there were reports that women were forced into prostitution, but the number of such cases is difficult to determine. The majority of prostitutes are not kept under physical constraint, but a large number labor under debt bondage (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.). The 1996 Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act makes child prostitution illegal and states that customers who patronize child prostitutes are subject to criminal sanctions. Parents who allow a child to enter the trade also are subject to criminal sanctions, but prosecutions remained low. NGO's and government agencies provide shelter, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs for children and women involved in the sex industry.

The 1998 Labor Protection Law made sexual harassment illegal for the first time, but covers only persons working in the private sector. NGO's claim that the term is vague and that such ambiguity makes the prosecution of harassment claims difficult. No sexual harassment cases were prosecuted under the act during the year.

The Constitution has six gender-related articles designed to provide women with equal rights and protections, but some inequalities in the law remain. A man may sue for divorce on the grounds that his wife committed adultery, but a woman faces the additional legal burden of proving that her husband has acknowledged publicly another women as his wife.

Women have equal access to higher education, and more than half of university graduates each year are women. However, police and military academies (except for the nursing academy) do not accept female students, although a significant number of instructors at the military academies are women. Women constitute 44 percent of the labor force and hold an increasing share of professional positions, and government regulations require employers to pay equal wages and benefits for equal work regardless of gender. Women are able to own and manage businesses freely. Discrimination in hiring is common, and there is a significant gap between the average salaries earned by men and women because women are concentrated in lower-paying jobs. In practice women also receive lower pay for equal work in virtually all sectors of the economy.

The Constitution includes an article that specifies that one-third of the members of the new National Human Rights Commission be women. The Women and Constitution Network, a league of 35 women's organizations, advocates for legal reforms to address legal inequities in the treatment of women. It continues to play an important role in securing the inclusion of gender equality clauses in legislation that create new government organizations mandated by the 1997 Constitution.

Children

In recent years, the Government took steps to promote the rights and welfare of children. The Constitution provides for the right of access to free public education through grade 12, and the Government mandates 9 years of compulsory education. An estimated 23 percent of children complete grade 6, and 10 percent complete grade 12. The Government's 1997 Social Welfare Plan for Underprivileged People doubled the budget for children's programs for 1997-2001, compared with the previous 5-year plan. Although special juvenile courts and detention centers exist in 29 provinces, children are tried in the same courts and detained with adults in the rest of the country.

Child labor remains a problem, and some international organizations, government-funded research organizations, and news media continued to report on the large number of children leaving school for economic reasons (see Section 6.d.).

The Criminal Code provides for the protection of children from abuse, and laws on rape and abandonment provide for harsher penalties if the victim is a child. However, as with domestic abuse, police are reluctant to investigate abuse cases, and rules of evidence make prosecution of child abuse cases difficult. In September legislation designed to protect witnesses, victims, and offenders under the age of 18 came into effect. The new procedures allow children to give evidence on videotape and in private surroundings in the presence of a psychologist, psychiatrist, or other social worker. Persons charged with pedophilia would be charged under appropriate age of consent and prostitution laws. Victims' testimony is handled under the provisions of the Child Friendly Procedure Act.

Child prostitution, including forced prostitution and trafficking in children, is a serious problem (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.). The Government, university researchers, and NGO's estimate that there are as many as 30,000 to 40,000 prostitutes under the age of 18.

People With Disabilities

The Government has enacted legislation designed to ensure access to public facilities and to prohibit employment and education discrimination against the disabled; however, it has not enforced these laws effectively. An estimated 110,000 disabled children attend school, with 60,000 to 70,000 enrolled in about 4,000 regular public schools that have been equipped to accommodate students with physical disabilities. Nationwide, there are 8 government-operated and 10 NGO-operated training centers for the disabled. However, with little education, very few disabled adults are able to find employment. Many of those who do find employment report being subjected to wage discrimination. The law requires that private firms hire 1 disabled person for every 200 other workers or contribute to a fund that benefits the disabled, but this provision has not been enforced since it came into effect in 1994. Some state enterprises maintain discriminatory hiring

policies.

The Constitution mandates access to public buildings for the disabled, but laws implementing the provisions have not yet been enacted. The 1999 regulation that makes compliance mandatory was not enforced during the year. Disabled persons who register with the Government are entitled to free medical examinations, wheelchairs, and crutches.

Indigenous People

In May the MOI redefined the category of hill tribe residents eligible for citizenship to include previously undocumented tribal people, now collectively called "highlanders". The new regulations also ease the requirement to establish citizenship. The new definition includes persons who formerly were defined either as indigenous or migrants. The new regulations also ease the requirement to establish citizenship by allowing a wider range of evidence and empowering local officials to decide cases. In August the Government agreed to grant citizenship to descendants of certain groups of resident aliens. Those without proper documentation, who account for approximately half the estimated 700,000 to 880,000 such persons, still face restrictions on their movement, may not own land, and are not protected by labor laws, including minimum wage requirements. They sometimes are denied adequate education and health care. Those residing in national parks or wildlife sanctuaries sometimes are subject to eviction. As noncitizen residents, they also are barred from participating in the political process.

Societal discrimination, arising from widely held beliefs that hill tribe members are involved in drug trafficking and forms of environmental degradation, continued. In June and August, a group of villagers attacked a Hmong orchard that allegedly encroached into an environmentally protected area. Hill tribes occasionally were subjected to indiscriminate searches of villages for illegal drugs (see Section 1.f.).

Religious Minorities

There were no reports of violence against members of religious minorities, but some societal discrimination remains. Muslims, who represent up to 10 percent of the country's population nationwide, and constitute the majority in four of the five southernmost provinces that border Malaysia, experienced some discrimination. The Government continued to address the problem by maintaining longstanding policies designed to integrate Muslim communities into society through developmental efforts and expanded educational opportunities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The Sino-Thai population is well integrated and does not face discrimination. However, about 50,000 former Chinese soldiers and dependents of a Kuomintang army that fled China after the Communist takeover and approximately 45,000 Vietnamese immigrants who reside in five northeastern provinces live under a set of laws and regulations that restrict their movement, residence, education, and occupation; however, these laws rarely are enforced (see Section 2.d.). According to Government sources, over 22,600 children of Vietnamese immigrants and 6,209 children of Chinese Kuomintang immigrants from these groups have been naturalized.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The 1975 Labor Relations Act grants freedom of association to all private sector workers, who have the right to form and join unions of their choosing without prior authorization; to decide on the constitutions and rules of these associations and unions; to express their views without government or employer interference; to confederate with other unions; to receive protection from discrimination, dissolution, suspension, or termination by any outside authority because of union activities; and to have employee representation in direct negotiations with employers. However, no law explicitly protects workers from discrimination who have participated in organizing new unions that have not been registered officially. Union leaders reported that employers often discriminate against workers seeking to organize unions. During the year, employers used loopholes in the Labor Relations Act to fire union leaders prior to government certification of new unions. The Government had not amended this legislation by year's end.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions criticized a draft revision of the Labor Relations Act, claiming that it restricted union rights. The Department of Labor's subsequent revision awaited presentation to the new Parliament at year's end.

In February 1999, the Government enacted the State Enterprise Labor Relations Act (SELRA), which provides

public sector employees in state enterprises the same workers' trade union rights to organize as exist in the private sector. SELRA prohibits lockouts by employers and strikes by state enterprise workers. It took effect in April 1999.

Less than 2 percent of the total work force, but nearly 11 percent of industrial workers, are unionized. Cultural traditions, unfamiliarity with the concept of industrial relations, efforts by the Government to diminish union cohesiveness, and the share of total employment that is agricultural often are cited as reasons for low rates of labor organization.

State enterprise unions do not have the right to join private sector federations. However, unofficial contacts between public and private sector unions continue, and the Government has not interfered with these relationships.

The Government has the authority to restrict private sector strikes that would "affect national security or cause severe negative repercussions for the population at large," although it seldom invokes this provision and did not do so during the year. Labor law also forbids strikes in "essential services," defined much more broadly than in the International Labor Organization (ILO) criteria, and includes sectors such as telecommunications, electricity, water supply, and public transportation as essential services. No strikes were disapproved during the year.

Some corrupt private sector union leaders have been exploited by politicians or employers, but public unions generally operate independently of the Government and other organizations. Internal conflicts, corruption, and a lack of influential leadership continued to weaken the labor movement.

Unions are free to associate internationally with other trade organizations, and they maintain a wide variety of such affiliations.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Labor Relations Act recognizes the right of private sector workers to organize and bargain collectively and defines the mechanisms for such negotiations and for government-assisted conciliation and arbitration in cases under dispute. In practice genuine collective bargaining occurs only in a small fraction of workplaces and in most instances continues to be characterized by a lack of sophistication on the part of employee groups and autocratic attitudes on the part of employers. Wage increases for most workers come as a result of increases in the minimum wage, rather than as a result of collective bargaining. The process of setting minimum wages locally through provincial tripartite committees may further limit union influence; many of these provincial committees have excluded labor representatives and have placed factory managers on the wage committees to represent worker interests.

The Government sets wages for both civil servants and state enterprise employees under SELRA. A system of labor courts created in 1980 exercises judicial review over most aspects of labor law for the private sector. Workers also may seek redress for grievances through the Tripartite Labor Relations Committee. Redress of grievances for state-enterprise workers is handled by the State Enterprise Relations Committee. Labor leaders generally were satisfied with the treatment that their concerns received in these forums, although they complained that union leaders dismissed unjustly usually are awarded only monetary compensation.

No separate labor legislation applies in the nine export processing zones, in which wages and working conditions often are better than national norms because of the preponderance of Western and Japan-based multinational firms.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor except in the case of national emergency, war, or martial law; however, while these provisions generally are enforced in the formal sector, forced labor in the informal sector remains a problem. The law specifically prohibits forced or bonded labor by children (see Section 6.d.). During the year, there were reports of sweatshops in which employers prevented workers from leaving the premises. There are no estimates of the number of such sweatshops, but the growing number of illegal aliens from Burma, Cambodia, and Laos increases the opportunities for such abuse. Trafficking in women and children for the purpose of prostitution also remains a serious problem (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

In 1998 the Government raised the legal minimum age for employment to 15 years. The law permits the employment of children between the ages of 15 and 18 only in "light work," where the lifting of heavy loads and exposure to toxic materials or dangerous equipment or situations is restricted. The employment of children at night (from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.), or in places in which alcohol is served, is prohibited by law. Children, perhaps more than 1 million children nationwide, work on family farms. NGO's report that 2 to 4 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 work in urban employment and are at risk of labor abuse. Most underage workers in urban areas work in the service sector, primarily at gasoline stations and restaurants. Child labor is not evident in larger foreign-owned or Thai export-oriented factories. However, no comprehensive survey of child labor in smaller enterprises exists, since NGO's do not have access to shop house factories. The DOL employed 803 full-time inspection officers during the year. Enforcement of child labor laws is not rigorous, and inspectors usually respond to specific public complaints, reports of absences by teachers, or reports in newspapers. Their inclination when dealing with violators is to negotiate promises of better future behavior, rather than to seek prosecution and punishment. The law prohibits all forms of child labor and implicitly includes forced or bonded labor by children (see Section 6.c.). The Government attempted to address the problem of child labor in 1998 by extending compulsory education from 6 to 9 years (see Section 5); however, the Primary Education Act has not been amended to implement this provision.

The Government worked to define worst forms of child labor in ILO Convention 182 and indicated its readiness to ratify the Convention in January 2001.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage ranges from \$3.30 to \$4.12 (133 to 165 baht) per day, depending on the cost of living in various provinces. This wage is not adequate to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. With extended family members' financial contributions, the minimum wage provides the basis for a marginally adequate overall standard of living. However, nationwide, more than half of workers receive less than the minimum wage, especially in rural provinces. Despite encouragement of employees to report violations to labor inspectors, the enforcement of minimum-wage laws is mixed.

Unskilled migrant workers as well as illegal aliens often work for wages that are significantly lower than the minimum wage. The minimum wage does not apply to undocumented hill tribe members, who also are not protected by other labor laws. The Ministry of Labor is responsible for ensuring that employers adhere to minimum wage requirements, but workers in rural provinces frequently are reported to receive less than the minimum wage.

In 1998 the Government mandated a uniform maximum workweek of 48 hours, with a limit on overtime of 35 hours per week. Employees engaged in "dangerous" work, such as in the chemical, mining, or other industries involving heavy machinery, may work a maximum of 35 hours per week. The petrochemical industry is excluded from these regulations.

Work permits for immigrant laborers initially are granted for 1 year, and routinely are extended for a second year. The Government deported 163,996 illegal workers during the year, most of them to Cambodia and Burma. The press criticized this program as ineffective, and NGO's reported that a large number of those deported return soon thereafter.

Working conditions vary widely. The rate of injury from industrial accidents has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years at 4.5 percent of the total work force. The MOL stated that the average annual rate of work-related deaths was 15 per 100,000 workers. Occupational diseases rarely are diagnosed or compensated, and few doctors or clinics specialize in occupational diseases. In medium-sized and large factories, government health and safety standards often are applied, but enforcement of safety standards is lax. In the large informal sector, health and safety protections are substandard.

Provisions of the Labor Protection Act include expanded protection for pregnant workers with prohibitions on working night shifts, overtime, or holidays, as well as for those working with dangerous machinery or on boats.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare promulgates health and safety regulations regarding conditions of work. Labor inspectors are responsible for enforcement of health and safety regulations; the strictest penalty is 6 months' imprisonment. Provisions in the Labor Protection Law include the establishment of welfare committees, which include worker representatives, in factories employing over 50 persons. These committees are to set and review health and safety conditions in each factory. There is no law affording job protection to employees who remove themselves from dangerous work situations. Master Toy Works employees protested unsafe working conditions in April. In October the factory closed, and its 279 laid-off workers received the mandatory compensation of \$750 (30,000 baht) each.

Courts continued to hear witnesses' testimony in the case of the 1993 Kader Toy Factory fire.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in women and children; however, the country is a source, transit place, and destination for trafficking in women and children for a variety of purposes that include indentured servitude and forced labor and prostitution (see Section 5); such trafficking is a serious problem. Government and NGO estimates of the number of women and children engaged in prostitution vary widely. Many NGO's and government departments report a figure of 200,000 persons, which is considered a conservative estimate. This figure includes children under the age of 18 and foreigners.

The Government, university researchers, and NGO's estimate that there are as many as 30,000 to 40,000 prostitutes under the age of 18. The Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act of 1996 made child prostitution illegal and provided for criminal punishments for those who use child prostitutes. Parents who allow a child to enter the trade also are punishable. The Government reported that it had convicted 36 parents under this clause in the first half of the year. The 1997 Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children Act increased the penalties for trafficking in women and children for the purposes of prostitution or slave labor, and provided for wide powers of search and assistance to victims. The authorities occasionally utilized these powers during the year, but the number of prosecutions remained minimal. A money-laundering law became effective in August 1999 and included provisions to enable authorities to confiscate the assets of persons convicted of trafficking or engaging in the business of prostitution. NGO's and government agencies continued to provide shelter, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs for children and women involved in the sex industry during the year. However, there continue to be credible reports that some corrupt police, military, and government officials are involved in trafficking (see Sections 1.c., 5, and 6.c.). There were no reported arrests of officials for trafficking during the year.

There were NGO reports of some women being forced into prostitution, usually in remote border areas but also in major cities. The accuracy of such reports and the numbers of persons involved are difficult to determine; however, coerced prostitution exists and is believed to involve women from hill tribes and women from neighboring countries. NGO's have reported that Burmese, Lao, Cambodian, and Chinese women continue to be trafficked, in some cases reportedly abducted, for prostitution. Vietnamese and Russian citizens also reportedly were trafficked to Thailand in smaller numbers. According to domestic NGO's, girls between the ages of 12 and 18 continued to be trafficked from Burma, southern China, and Laos to work in the commercial sex industry. Persons trafficked from China generally were in transit to other countries. Reportedly as many as 8,000 women were trafficked from Russia, Ukraine, and other former Soviet Republics for work in the sex industry in the country by year's end. This figure represents a substantial increase from 1999.

Because foreign women frequently are unable to speak the Thai language and are considered illegal immigrants, these women are vulnerable to physical abuse and exploitation. Some women are lured into the country with promises of jobs as waitresses or domestic helpers, but are forced to work as prostitutes. Illegal immigrants have no rights to legal counsel or health care if arrested (see Section 2.d.). The amnesty provisions available unde